

140 Pounds of Chemical Agent to Be Used in Burning Tests

A four-month test of incineration as a means of destroying the incapacitating chemical agent, BZ, scheduled to begin Monday at the Pine Bluff Arsenal, will use about 140 pounds of BZ, Army officials said yesterday.

The pilot tests are designed to obtain information for future destruction at the Arsenal of about 10,700 pounds of bulk BZ, plus 522 M-138 cluster bombs and 973 BZ cluster generators, according to Jim Bacon, executive assistant to Colonel Phillip D. Thorne, Arsenal commander.

Bacon told reporters at an afternoon press conference that BZ, a non-lethal chemical that produces a temporary disabling condition, was produced at the Arsenal from 1962 through 1964. The destruction of BZ is being planned because the Army's stockpile has exceeded its expected shelf life.

The tests, which will cost about \$600,000, are to be conducted by a four-man crew in an earthen covered igloo, he said. Only five pounds of the odorless white crystal and 33 pounds of the explosives will be at the test site at one time, Bacon said. The incinerator system that will be used for the tests, however, can only destroy about 30 grams (about 1 ounce) of BZ a minute, he said, adding that the complicated system would make it impossible for BZ to escape into the atmosphere.

The tests begin when BZ enters an explosive/gas containment vessel,

where it is burned at 1,200°. A vapor incinerator then destroys all vapors and the process is repeated through an afterburner. The final process includes a water quench system and a decontaminant furnace, Bacon said. Only one vent is used, with a ventilation filtration system at the end of the igloo, he said.

Complete disposal of the Army's BZ stockpile, stored mainly in 16-gallon drums, is scheduled for 1986 through 1988, Bacon said. He added that construction of the large incinerator system for the complete destruction should begin at the Arsenal in late 1983.

To date, \$5.8 million has been spent on the study of BZ destruction, including a \$1-million test previously conducted by Batelle Columbus Laboratories of Columbus, Georgia, Bacon said.

Those tests, using the same incinerator system now in place at the Arsenal, were successful, he said. The system was transported to the Arsenal this summer, Bacon said.

After a 45-minute slide presentation, Bacon told reporters that seven people have been exposed to BZ here since 1964. Six were exposed during maintenance and cleanup procedures after production stopped in 1964, and one person was exposed when the BZ production plant was being disassembled, he said.

All of the affected persons returned to duty with no recurring effects, he said.

Also, a fire erupted in a BZ storage igloo at the Arsenal in 1971, according to Tom Shook, environmental coordinator at the Arsenal. Shook said an extremely small amount of BZ — if any at all — escaped into the atmosphere.

Bacon said there was no potential danger and that he considered the system safe to the working personnel, the environment and the local community.

Previous Army descriptions said the effects of BZ included temporary dizziness, disorientation and hallucinations.

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